

§ 4.17

income exceeds the poverty threshold. Consideration shall be given in all claims to the nature of the employment and the reason for termination.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 501)

(b) It is the established policy of the Department of Veterans Affairs that all veterans who are unable to secure and follow a substantially gainful occupation by reason of service-connected disabilities shall be rated totally disabled. Therefore, rating boards should submit to the Director, Compensation and Pension Service, for extra-schedular consideration all cases of veterans who are unemployable by reason of service-connected disabilities, but who fail to meet the percentage standards set forth in paragraph (a) of this section. The rating board will include a full statement as to the veteran's service-connected disabilities, employment history, educational and vocational attainment and all other factors having a bearing on the issue.

[40 FR 42535, Sept. 15, 1975, as amended at 54 FR 4281, Jan. 30, 1989; 55 FR 31580, Aug. 3, 1990; 58 FR 39664, July 26, 1993; 61 FR 52700, Oct. 8, 1996]

§ 4.17 Total disability ratings for pension based on unemployability and age of the individual.

All veterans who are basically eligible and who are unable to secure and follow a substantially gainful occupation by reason of disabilities which are likely to be permanent shall be rated as permanently and totally disabled. For the purpose of pension, the permanence of the percentage requirements of § 4.16 is a requisite. When the percentage requirements are met, and the disabilities involved are of a permanent nature, a rating of permanent and total disability will be assigned if the veteran is found to be unable to secure and follow substantially gainful employment by reason of such disability. Prior employment or unemployment status is immaterial if in the judgment of the rating board the veteran's disabilities render him or her unemployable. In making such determinations, the following guidelines will be used:

(a) Marginal employment, for example, as a self-employed farmer or other person, while employed in his or her

38 CFR Ch. I (7-1-97 Edition)

own business, or at odd jobs or while employed at less than half the usual remuneration will not be considered incompatible with a determination of unemployability, if the restriction, as to securing or retaining better employment, is due to disability.

(b) Claims of all veterans who fail to meet the percentage standards but who meet the basic entitlement criteria and are unemployable, will be referred by the rating board to the Adjudication Officer under § 3.321(b)(2) of this chapter.

(Authority: 38 U.S.C. 1155; 38 U.S.C. 3102)

[43 FR 45348, Oct. 2, 1978, as amended at 56 FR 57985, Nov. 15, 1991]

§ 4.17a Misconduct etiology.

A permanent and total disability rating under the provisions of §§ 4.15, 4.16 and 4.17 will not be precluded by reason of the coexistence of misconduct disability when:

(a) A veteran, regardless of employment status, also has innocently acquired 100 percent disability, or

(b) Where unemployable, the veteran has other disabilities innocently acquired which meet the percentage requirements of §§ 4.16 and 4.17 and would render, in the judgment of the rating agency, the average person unable to secure or follow a substantially gainful occupation.

[40 FR 42536, Sept. 15, 1975, as amended at 43 FR 45349, Oct. 2, 1978]

§ 4.18 Unemployability.

A veteran may be considered as unemployable upon termination of employment which was provided on account of disability, or in which special consideration was given on account of the same, when it is satisfactorily shown that he or she is unable to secure further employment. With amputations, sequelae of fractures and other residuals of traumatism shown to be of static character, a showing of continuous unemployability from date of incurrence, or the date the condition reached the stabilized level, is a general requirement in order to establish the fact that present unemployability is the result of the disability. However,

Department of Veterans Affairs

§ 4.24

consideration is to be given to the circumstances of employment in individual claims, and, if the employment was only occasional, intermittent, tryout or unsuccessful, or eventually terminated on account of the disability, present unemployability may be attributed to the static disability. Where unemployability for pension previously has been established on the basis of combined service-connected and non-service-connected disabilities and the service-connected disability or disabilities have increased in severity, § 4.16 is for consideration.

[40 FR 42536, Sept. 15, 1975, as amended at 43 FR 45349, Oct. 2, 1978]

§ 4.19 Age in service-connected claims.

Age may not be considered as a factor in evaluating service-connected disability; and unemployability, in service-connected claims, associated with advancing age or intercurrent disability, may not be used as a basis for a total disability rating. Age, as such, is a factor only in evaluations of disability not resulting from service, i.e., for the purposes of pension.

[29 FR 6718, May 22, 1964, as amended at 43 FR 45349, Oct. 2, 1978]

§ 4.20 Analogous ratings.

When an unlisted condition is encountered it will be permissible to rate under a closely related disease or injury in which not only the functions affected, but the anatomical localization and symptomatology are closely analogous. Conjectural analogies will be avoided, as will the use of analogous ratings for conditions of doubtful diagnosis, or for those not fully supported by clinical and laboratory findings. Nor will ratings assigned to organic diseases and injuries be assigned by analogy to conditions of functional origin.

§ 4.21 Application of rating schedule.

In view of the number of atypical instances it is not expected, especially with the more fully described grades of disabilities, that all cases will show all the findings specified. Findings sufficiently characteristic to identify the disease and the disability therefrom, and above all, coordination of rating

with impairment of function will, however, be expected in all instances.

[41 FR 11293, Mar. 18, 1976]

§ 4.22 Rating of disabilities aggravated by active service.

In cases involving aggravation by active service, the rating will reflect only the degree of disability over and above the degree existing at the time of entrance into the active service, whether the particular condition was noted at the time of entrance into the active service, or it is determined upon the evidence of record to have existed at that time. It is necessary therefore, in all cases of this character to deduct from the present degree of disability the degree, if ascertainable, of the disability existing at the time of entrance into active service, in terms of the rating schedule, except that if the disability is total (100 percent) no deduction will be made. The resulting difference will be recorded on the rating sheet. If the degree of disability at the time of entrance into the service is not ascertainable in terms of the schedule, no deduction will be made.

§ 4.23 Attitude of rating officers.

It is to be remembered that the majority of applicants are disabled persons who are seeking benefits of law to which they believe themselves entitled. In the exercise of his or her functions, rating officers must not allow their personal feelings to intrude; an antagonistic, critical, or even abusive attitude on the part of a claimant should not in any instance influence the officers in the handling of the case. Fairness and courtesy must at all times be shown to applicants by all employees whose duties bring them in contact, directly or indirectly, with the Department's claimants.

[41 FR 11292, Mar. 18, 1976]

§ 4.24 Correspondence.

All correspondence relative to the interpretation of the schedule for rating disabilities, requests for advisory opinions, questions regarding lack of clarity or application to individual cases involving unusual difficulties, will be addressed to the Director, Compensation and Pension Service. A clear